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MONTANA

Environmental Quality Council

1973

Vol. 1, No. 4

September 18, 1973

Box 215, Capitol Station, Helena, MT 59601

Senator Elmer Flynn, Chairman

Fletcher E. Newby, Executive Director

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NEW ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS



EQC MEETS

At a lengthy September 14 meeting, the Environmental Quality Council (EQC) gave final approval to its revised guidelines for environmental impact statements and discussed both previous and new recommendations for legislation.

Suggestions from several state agencies about the guidelines were analyzed and most were incorporated.

The new legislation recommendations included a geothermal resources act which would regulate exploration, drilling, redrilling, deepening and abandonment of wells for discovery and production of geothermal resources.

IMPACT STATEMENT TIME LIMIT RELAXED

The Environmental Quality Council at its September 14 meeting acceded to the Department of State Lands' plan to shorten the time required for review of environmental impact statements pertaining to strip mining permits.

Because of the combination of the time frame established by the 1973 Montana Strip Mining and Reclamation Act, the time required to formulate and adopt rules and regulations under the act and the time periods required by the EQC regarding environmental impact statements, the department reports it is impossible for mining companies to comply with the law and still obtain permits before their reclamation contracts are terminated. The 1973 act requires that contracts entered under the old law be cancelled and new applications be filed.

The Department of State Lands said the ramifications of the temporary shutting down of companies for a few weeks was an important reason for shortening the time requirement.

The EQC had no objection to shortening the time as long as the department and the companies proceed in good-faith compliance with the Environmental Policy Act and allow reasonable time for public review.

RESERVOIR DRAINING CONTROVERSIAL

The draining of Painted Rocks Reservoir on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River has elicited several complaints from citizens who thought the impact of the project was significant enough to have required the filing of an environmental impact statement. The Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Division, is responsible for the project.

The reservoir is being drained to allow repairs on the dam. This will reportedly dewater seven miles of the West Fork, an important trout stream.

A Department of Highways bridge construction project also has been affected by the draining. Because of the higher water level, water flowed into excavation for a pier footing.

The Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Division, has agreed to pump one cubic foot per second (cfs) around the dam in an effort to alleviate the impact on the stream. Usual stream flow at this time of year averages about 100 cfs.

The Montana Environmental Policy Act requires that an impact statement be filed for any action "significantly affecting the natural environment."

At its September 14 meeting, the EQC resolved to encourage the Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Division, to utilize environmental impact statements in any future projects of similar magnitude to facilitate public review and interagency coordination.

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS SOLICITED ABOUT HOERNER-WALDORF PERMIT REQUEST

The Department of Health and Environmental Sciences (HES) has asked 22 Montana citizens, environmental groups and agencies for comments and questions about Hoerner-Waldorf Corporation's request for a permit to construct equipment.

The corporation's construction, "that might be capable of emitting air contaminants," concerns proposed expansion of the paper mill near Missoula.

As required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), the HES department must write an environmental impact statement before the permit can be issued or denied. The department estimates it will take at least 90 days to gather information about whether the proposed expansion would be able to conform with state and federal air and water pollution laws.

The comments and questions are being sought because of the special interests and expertise of the citizens, groups and agencies concerning the plant and its proposed expansion. The HES department will send the interested parties an outline of the draft statement and invite comments and questions no less than two weeks prior to the issuance of the draft statement. The department then will attempt to address their concerns in the draft statement.

Because of the controversy the department expects about the Hoerner-Waldorf proposal, they foresee a waiting period of at least 75 days, following issuance of the draft statement, before the expansion could be approved. The department also expects that, because of the controversy, a public hearing will follow publication of the draft statement.

POWER LINE IMPACTS MINIMAL

Environmental analyses of two proposed Montana Power Company 100 kv transmission

lines, one from Billings to Laurel and another from Laurel to Bridger, conclude that overall environmental impacts would be minimal. The analyses by the Department of Natural Resources, Energy Planning Division, note that the major environmental impacts of the lines would be aesthetic.

The Billings-Laurel line, if built along the route preferred by the Montana Power Company (one of five possible routes), would go through portions of the Yellowstone Valley that are highly productive, irrigated cropland. However, the line would follow existing roads, dedicated rights-of-way or canals.

The Laurel-Bridger line, if built on the route preferred by the Montana Power Company (one of four possible routes), crosses land which is primarily rangeland and in some places follows existing roads, fences or rights-of-way. The analysis states there is little anticipated impact upon the agricultural practices of the area. The line, however, would be visible for a considerable distance over much of its length. In some places, support structures would stand on prominent land-forms, creating an even greater visual impact.

Both lines, according to the analyses, would increase reliability of electrical services in the areas and transmission capacity to meet growing demands for the near future.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT ON LEAVE

Tom Gill, EQC research assistant for the past two years, has left the staff for an educational leave of absence at the University of Utah. Gill's report on coal development in eastern Montana was widely quoted in national publications.

STATE

<u>Date Received</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Lead Agency</u>	
9-4-73	Kalispell Storm Drain in City of Kalispell Installation of a main trunk line.	Hwy	N
9-7-73	1st Ave. So., State Ave. and Orchard Lane, Billings. Project proposes to add a semi- actuated signal controller at State Ave. and Orchard Lane.	Hwy	N

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<u>Date Received</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Lead Agency</u>	
9-7-73	Use of Fish Toxicants in farm ponds, storage reservoirs and small natural lakes to eliminate undesirable fish populations.	F&G	Amended N
9-10-73	Rest area 4 miles west of Rogers Pass. Project proposes complete rest area and widening portion of PTW to provide left turn bay	Hwy	N
9-10-73	Smith Lake Vista Subdivision located near Kila in Flathead Co. 72.5 acres.	HES	D
9-11-73	Swan Meadows Subdivision near Bigfork in Flathead Co. 17 acres.	HES	D
9-11-73	7 mi. east of Miles City and extends east approximately 6 mi. to connect to 4-lane interstate.	Hwy	N
9-12-73	Barry St. Underpass-Glendive. Installing a pump of sufficient capacity to handle drainage.	Hwy	N

FEDERAL

9-12-73	Glacier National Park master plan and preliminary wilderness study report. Establishment of wilderness comprising about 917,600 acres in GNP, Flathead and Glacier Counties.	NPS/GNP	D
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C - Commented upon	HES - Dept. of Health and Environmental Sciences
D - Draft statement	Hwy - Highway Department
EW - Emergency Waiver	DNR&C - Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation
F - Final statement	F&G - Dept. of Fish and Game
N - Negative declaration	PED - Planning & Economic Development Div., IRG
	USDA - US Dept. of Agriculture

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